

Message Text

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R 311515Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5538
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA
AMEMBASSY TUNIS
AMEMBASSY VALLETTA
USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 TRIPOLI 0775

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, LY
SUBJECT: QADHAFI SECURE AT HOME AND ACTIVE ABROAD

SUMMARY. DESPITE MORE OPEN CRITICISM OF HIS POLITICAL AND
ECONOMIC PROGRAM THAN WAS APPARENT A YEAR AGO, LIBYA'S MUAMMAR
AL-QADHAFI REMAINS IN A STRONG DOMESTIC POSITION AS LIBYA
PREPARES TO CELEBRATE THE EIGHTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE AMERICAN
"EVACUATION" OF WHEELUS AIRBASE JUNE 11. WHILE THE COLONEL'S
PUBLIC APPEARANCES IN TRIPOLI HAVE BEEN MINIMAL OVER THE PAST
FEW MONTHS, HE HAS CONTINUED TO BE ACTIVE IN OTHER PARTS
OF THE COUNTRY AND ESPECIALLY IN THE BENGHAZI AREA WHERE
RESISTANCE TO HIS REGIME IS STRONGEST. IN RECENT WEEKS, HE
HAS DELIVERED MAJOR PRONOUNCEMENTS ON BOTH DOMESTIC AND
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND HAS MADE GENUINE HEADWAY
TOWARDS PARTIAL IMPLEMENTATION OF HIS RADICAL DOMESTIC
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PROGRAM BASED ON A NEW VARIANT OF ISLAMIC SOCIALISM.
REPORTS (AND RUMORS) OF CONTINUING ARRESTS AMONG MILITARY
AND RELIGIOUS RANKS ARE RAMPANT BUT NOT PARTICULARLY
OMINOUS, AND QADHAFI IS THUS FAR IMPLEMENTING THE REAL
ESTATE AND MILITARY SERVICE LAWS CENTRAL TO HIS GREEN BOOK
CAMPAIGN WITH A MINIMUM OF SIGNIFICANT OPPOSITION AND WITH
GREATER SPEED THAN ANTICIPATED. END SUMMARY.

1. THE MARCH 6 HELICOPTER CRASH WHICH KILLED KEY QADHAFI ADVISOR TAHA SHARIF BIN AMIR AND MEMBERS OF A VISITING GDR DELEGATION WAS VIEWED BY MANY IN TRIPOLI AND IN THE PRESS ABROAD AS YET ANOTHER PLOT TO ASSASSINATE THE LIBYAN LEADER. QADHAFI'S SUBSEQUENT TWO WEEKS OF DESERT ISOLATION AND THE TEMPORARY DETENTION OF AIR FORCE COMMANDER SALIH FARAJANI TENDED TO LEND SOME CREDENCE TO THESE REPORTS, ALTHOUGH THE INCIDENT WAS PROBABLY DUE TO PILOT ERROR OR MAINTENANCE DEFICIENCIES.

2. IN ANY EVENT, ALTHOUGH QADHAFI HAS SINCE CONTINUED TO MAINTAIN A LOW PROFILE IN TRIPOLI, HE HAS NOT FURTHER SECLUDED HIMSELF FOR LONG PERIODS IN HIS TENT NEAR SIRTE NOR HAS HE ABDICATED HIS AUTHORITY TO THE OTHER FOUR MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT. INSTEAD, SINCE MARCH 19, HE HAS, IF ANYTHING, BEEN MORE ACTIVE THAN USUAL. ON THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL, LIBYAN NUMBER TWO ABD AL-SALAM JALLUD RECENTLY TOLD THE ITALIAN AMBASSADOR HERE THAT QADHAFI HAD DIRECTED HIM TO HANDLE FOREIGN AFFAIRS AS HE WOULD "HAVE HIS HANDS FULL" WITH DOMESTIC ISSUES. NEVERTHELESS, QADHAFI HAS CONTINUED TO MEET WITH FOREIGN LEADERS (I.E., RWANDA'S HABYARIMANA MAY 29) AND HAS DELIVERED IMPORTANT FOREIGN POLICY PRONOUNCEMENTS OVER THE PAST TWO MONTHS IN SPITE OF HIS CONCENTRATION ON DOMESTIC MATTERS. HE CAN BE EXPECTED TO CONTINUE

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THESE ACTIVITIES IN THE FUTURE AS THE CHAD TALKS RESUME JUNE 7 AND AS THE CELEBRATIONS OF "AMERICAN EVACUATION DAY" GIVE HIM AN IDEAL FORUM FROM WHICH TO EXPOUND ON BOTH DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN ISSUES. STILL, QADHAFI WILL ONLY SET THE GENERAL TONE, AND IT WILL AGAIN BE REGIME STALWARTS SUCH AS JALLUD, FOREIGN SECRETARY TURAYKI, AND FOREIGN LIAISON BUREAU CHIEF SHAHATI WHO WILL BE TASKED TO AMPLIFY THESE INTERNATIONAL THEMES AS HAS BEEN THE CASE IN PAST.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 TRIPOLI 0775

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3. ON THE DOMESTIC LEVEL, THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT QADHAFI'S CONSIDERABLE ENERGIES IN THIS DIRECTION HAVE RECENTLY MET WITH TANGIBLE SUCCESS, AND ESSENTIALLY, IT HAS BEEN THE LIBYAN LEADER, HIMSELF, WHO HAS SKILLFULLY, IF SOMEWHAT PATENTLY, ORCHESTRATED THE CAMPAIGN TO GENERATE SUPPORT FOR AND IMPLEMENTATION OF CONTROVERSIAL ASPECTS HIS DOMESTIC PROGRAM. ON AN ALMOST DAILY BASIS FOR THE PAST TWO MONTHS, QADHAFI'S PHOTO HAS BEEN FEATURED ON THE FRONT PAGE OF THE NEWSPAPER EXPLAINING ECONOMIC FACETS OF HIS "GREEN BOOK" TO STUDENTS, WORKERS, AND LOCAL POPULAR COMMITTEES. TELEGRAMS OF SUPPORT ARE BROADCAST DAILY FROM SUCH VARIED SOURCES AS SPORTS CLUBS, TRIBAL ASSOCIATIONS, AND VEHICLE MAINTENANCE AND SANITARY ENGINEER UNIONS.

4. ALL OF THESE TELEGRAMS SAY THE SAME THING -- NAMELY, THAT THE PEOPLE ALL SUPPORT QADHAFI'S "GREEN BOOK," THE
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CENTRAL TENET OF WHICH IS THAT "POWER," "WEALTH," AND "ARMS" MUST BE HANDED OVER TO THE PEOPLE. POLITICAL POWER WAS TRANSFERRED TO THE POPULAR COMMITTEES DURING THE 1977 TRANSFORMATION OF LIBYA FROM A "JUMHURIYAH" (REPUBLIC) INTO A "JAMAHIRIYAH" (PUBLIC). THE PROBLEM OF "WEALTH" AND "ARMS" WAS DEALT WITH IN AN IMPORTANT -- BUT RAMBLING -- MARCH 19, 1978, ADDRESS AT JABAL AL-AKHDAR IN CYRENAICA (TRIPOLI 0437). QADHAFI STRESSED AT THIS TIME THAT IMPLEMENTATION OF HIS LAND CONSCRIPTION PROPOSALS WAS CONTINGENT ON APPROVAL BY LOCAL POPULAR CONGRESSES, AND MOST OBSERVERS FELT IMPLEMENTATION WOULD BE SLOW IN COMING. HOWEVER, THIS "POPULAR" APPROVAL WAS ANNOUNCED BY RADIO

TRIPOLI ON APRIL 6 (TRIPOLI 0536) AND FORMAL STATUTES IMPLEMENTING BOTH MEASURES WERE PUBLISHED MAY 6 (TRIPOLI 0696 AND 0703).

5. LAND IN LIBYA, AS IN MOST OF THE ARAB WORLD, IS SYNONOMOUS WITH WEALTH, AND THUS WHEN QADHAFI ON MARCH 19 REPEATED THE CRY THAT "LANDLORDISM" MUST GO AND THAT THE HOUSE BELONGS TO ITS LESSEE, HE WAS RAISING A MANIFESTO WHICH WAS RADICAL FOR MOST SEGMENTS OF LIBYAN SOCIETY. UNDER THE NEW MEASURE, EACH LIBYAN CITIZEN MAY NOW OWN ONE RESIDENCE ONLY. COMPLETE INFORMATION ON ALL ADDITIONAL PROPERTIES MUST BE TURNED OVER TO THE GOVERNMENT NO LATER THAN JULY 14. THESE EXCESS PROPERTIES WILL THEN BE DISTRIBUTED TO ELIGIBLE RECIPIENTS ACCORDING TO AN ILL-DEFINED SYSTEM OF PRIORITY CLASSES. OWNERSHIP OF MORE THAN ONE RESIDENCE IS POSSIBLE IN ONLY LIMITED CIRCUMSTANCES OR IF IT SERVES THE NEEDS OF THE STATE. COMPENSATION FOR "EXCESS" PROPERTY WILL BE PROVIDED, ALTHOUGH THIS WILL CERTAINLY BE NO WHERE NEAR TRUE MARKET VALUE.

6. THE REAL ESTATE MEASURE WAS BOUND TO GENERATE CRITICISM, CONFIDENTIAL

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BUT ITS NET EFFECT HAS THUS FAR BEEN SMALL. ON THE CIVILIAN SIDE, WEALTHY LIBYANS AT FIRST GLANCE SUFFER THE MOST, BUT THE HANDWRITING HAS BEEN ON THE WALL FOR YEARS, AND THE LIBYAN UPPER CLASS MUST BE PRESUMED TO HAVE LARGE SUMS OF CASH IN BANKS ABROAD. STILL, REPORTS ARE PRESENTLY CIRCULATING THAT AN AS YET AMORPHOUS LANDLORD MOVEMENT IS TRYING TO RALLY SUPPORT TO REFUSE ANY COMPENSATION PROFFERED BY THE STATE. THE REAL LOSERS UNDER THE LAW ARE MEMBERS OF THE SMALL BUT GROWING MIDDLE CLASS. NOT ONLY WILL THEY BE UNABLE FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE TO BUY THE HOME OF THEIR CHOICE EVEN IF THE MONEY IS NOW AVAILABLE, BUT THE OPTION OF BUYING IN THE FUTURE IS NOW ELIMINATED OR SEVERELY RESTRICTED AS WELL. THE POORER CLASSES GAIN BY THE MEASURE, BUT EVEN SO, THEY DO NOT NECESSARILY ACQUIRE THE HOUSE OR APARTMENT THEY ARE LIVING IN, CONTRARY TO THE POPULAR SLOGANS.

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7. ON THE MILITARY SIDE, QADHAFI MUST BE CREDITED WITH RECOGNIZING THAT ANY REGIME SUCCEEDING HIS WILL BE DRAWN FROM THE ARMED FORCES, AND HE WILL, THEREFORE, NOT ATTEMPT TO IMPLEMENT ANY MEASURE WHICH WILL STIR SERIOUS CONTROVERSY AMONG HIS MILITARY COLLEAGUES. WHAT WEALTHY MILITARY THERE WERE IN THE OFFICER CADRE HAVE ALREADY BEEN PURGED. REMAINING MIDDLE CLASS OFFICERS WILL SUFFER LIKE THEIR CIVILIAN COUNTERPARTS, BUT THE BULK OF THE OFFICER CORPS IS YOUNG AND ONLY NOW BEGINNING TO ENJOY THE FRUITS OF REASONABLE MIDDLE CLASS INCOMES. THEY STAND TO GAIN BY QADHAFI'S REAL ESTATE MEASURE, IF ONLY THROUGH RECEIVING PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT IN OBTAINING RESIDENCES TURNED OVER TO THE GOVERNMENT UNDER PROVISIONS OF THE NEW LAW.

8. SIMILARLY, FOR A POPULATION WHICH LARGELY PERCEIVES NO FOREIGN THREAT AND WHICH IS ANXIOUS TO ACQUIRE DECENT
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EDUCATION, MATERIAL COMFORTS, AND TO PURSUE PROFESSIONAL OR VOCATIONAL OBJECTIVES, THE IDEA OF "ARMING THE MASSES" HOLDS NO APPEAL. ON PAPER, HOWEVER, THE MILITARY SERVICE LAW IS NOT AS RADICAL AS QADHAFI'S INITIAL RHETORIC IMPLIED. RATHER THAN ARMING THE MASSES HAPHAZARDLY, THE LAW REQUIRES ALL MALES BETWEEN THE AGES OF 18 AND 35 TO SERVE A TOUR OF DUTY IN THE MILITARY. STUDENTS ARE DEFERRED UNTIL COMPLETION OF STUDIES. THE MILITARY IS HAPPY WITH THIS NEW MEASURE WHICH AT LEAST IN THEORY WILL PROVIDE THE MANPOWER NECESSARY TO HANDLE THE GROWING

STOCKPILE OF SOVIET WEAPONRY. YOUNG PEOPLE, ALTHOUGH VERY UNHAPPY, ARE FATALISTIC ABOUT THE MEASURE. IN ANY CASE, THE LIBYAN GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN EXCEEDINGLY GENEROUS IN TERMS OF SCHOLARSHIPS AND EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES, AND IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT PUBLIC OPPOSITION AMONG STUDENTS AGAINST THIS TOKEN REPAYMENT HAS BEEN VIRTUALLY NIL.

9. IN SUM, THEN, QADHAFI APPROACHES THE JUNE CELEBRATIONS OF "AMERICAN EVACUATION DAY" -- IN THE PAST AN OCCASION FOR PUBLIC REVELRY AND REVOLUTIONARY RHETORIC -- NEITHER ISOLATED ABROAD NOR BELEAGUERED AT HOME. WHILE LIBYA FACES SOME SERIOUS ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, LARGELY IN THE AREA OF LABOR AND LIQUIDITY SHORTAGES, THESE PROBLEMS SHOULD HAVE LITTLE IMPACT ON POLITICAL STABILITY. AS LONG AS QADHAFI PLACATES HIS MILITARY MAINSTAY -- AND HE HAS THE FUNDS, CUNNING AND CHARISMA TO DO SO -- HIS POSITION IN LIBYA IS SECURE, ALTHOUGH THE VERY REAL THREAT OF ASSASSINATION SHOULD NOT BE OVERLOOKED OR MINIMIZED. IN RECENT WEEKS, THE MOST VOCAL DISSENT AGAINST THE REGIME HAS COME PRIMARILY FROM THE MOSQUES WHERE THERE IS RESURGENT CONCERN THAT QADHAFI'S "GREEN BOOK" CAMPAIGN IS A COVER FOR "ATHEISTIC COMMUNISM," AND THAT QADHAFI INTENDS TO PRESS THE SHARP ATTACK ON THE LOCAL MOSLEM CLERGY WHICH HE LAUNCHED ON

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THE PROPHET'S BIRTHDAY IN JANUARY. A LARGE NUMBER OF SHAYKHS WAS ARRESTED TWO WEEKS AGO FOR INDIRECT CRITICISM OF THE REGIME DURING FRIDAY SERMONS, BUT THEY HAVE APPARENTLY BEEN RELEASED. QADHAFI HIMSELF TOOK TO THE PULPIT ON MAY 26 AT TRIPOLI'S CENTRAL MOSQUE (FORMERLY THE CATHOLIC CATHEDRAL), BUT HIS ADDRESS WAS CONFINED TO EXPLAINING A PASSAGE OF THE QUR'AN TO A CONGREGATION COMPOSED OF FOREIGN STUDENTS STUDYING ISLAM UNDER LIBYAN GOVERNMENT AUSPICES.

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